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ABSTRACT

Writing textbooks are changing to reflect the curricular shift from an emphasis on product to an emphasis on process. The product approach focused mainly on surface features and used an instructional strategy of testing writing rather than teaching it. The process approach focuses on what effective writers do as they move through the stages of prewriting, organizing, drafting, and revising. Newer texts are still divided into composition and grammar sections, but the order and emphasis are reversed. The composition section comes first and is more comprehensive, while grammar instruction is an adjunct to writing instruction, not isolated information taught for its own sake. Older texts progress from words to sentences to paragraphs to longer papers, while newer texts help the teacher teach the whole composition. Information is presented according to the categories of expressive, informative, persuasive, and imaginative writing, and each lesson in each chapter takes the students step-by-step through the four stages of the writing process. Students write constantly in journals, but teachers need grade only finished products. Another trend, the replacement of teachers' manuals with full teachers' editions, provides comprehensive, easily employed teaching aids. Finally, new curricula and new texts lead to a new, more vital and productive classroom atmosphere. (JL)

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LANGUAGE ARTS--NEW TRENDS IN TEXTBOOKS

As you know, the study of English in the highschool is not so much a unified discipline as it is a collection of topics--literature, grammar, usage, speech, spelling, vocabulary development, history of the language, composition. This is, perhaps, why the study of English is so often referred to as the Language Arts. Today, rather than attempting to describe new trends in all of the topics subsumed under the general rubric of English, I'd like to focus my remarks on that topic in the English curriculum which has been receiving the most attention over the last several years--attention that has influenced major changes in language arts textbooks--elementary grades through graduate school. This topic is, of course, writing.

Because educational publishing exists as a service entity--providing the sorts of instructional materials asked for by educators--it is, of necessity, reactionary. Textbooks do not initiate changes in subject-matter curricula; they simply reflect them. The particular trend in English textbooks I'll be describing, then, is the direct result of one of the recent curricular developments described by John Maxwell in his keynote address. As a result of changing ideas about how writing can best be taught (the curriculum), English composition and grammar materials (the textbooks) are also changing. Both curricular and textbook changes might be summarized as changes from an emphasis on <u>product</u> to an emphasis on <u>process.</u>

In the past, English texts have mirrored teacher's preoccupation with the end product of writing--the finished piece. Because of this emphasis, the texts dealt most strongly with the bits and pieces of writing--grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation--and with matters of form and

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structure--the topic sentence, methods of paragraph development, the five-paragraph theme. While important, these are essentially surface features--the mechanical framework upon which ideas are hung. And, as Barry Beyer in last November's Phi Delta Kappan reminds us: "Overemphasizing the mechanics of writing leads too often to hollow prose, to communication without content, to form without substance." (MAKING THE PEN MIGHTIER, Phi Delta Kappan, Nov. 1982.)

Emphasis on product also leads to the very common instructional strategy of testing writing rather than teaching it. For instance, see if this sounds familiar.

It's Friday afternoon--five minutes before the end of the period. The teacher says, "For Monday, I'd like you to write an expository paragraph. Be sure to begin the paragraph with a good topic sentence. Then follow it with at least three sentences of supporting details, and conclude the paragraph with a good clincher sentence. If you need help, review the section on the expository paragraph in your English text."

On Monday, the teacher collects the paragraphs, conscientiously marks all the errors in spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure, puts grades on the papers and hands them back. The idea is that the students, seeing all the "errors" marked on their papers will study them carefully (with the help of their textbook) and will not repeat the same errors on the next assignment, even if the next assignment is different. What's really happening here? The teacher is giving a test--a test of the students' ability to produce a specific product--then teaching writing by pointing out what went wrong on the test. And the teacher's corrections--the teaching--deal primarily with matters of mechanics and form, not with content.

In the past several years, a new paradigm for teaching writing has emerged, and English textbooks are currently being developed that reflect its

emphasis--writing as a process. In this approach, writing is viewed as a process that moves through a series of recursive, yet more or less clearly distinguishable, stages. These stages are most often called prewriting, organizing, drafting, and revising. The focus is on what effective writers do as they move through the stages in this process.

During the prewriting stage, the writer is primarily concerned with invention--discovering and generating ideas--finding all sorts of answers to the question, What do I have to write about?

During the organizing stage, the writer is primarily concerned with selection and arrangement--surveying the mass of random material generated by prewriting to discover a pattern of relationships and then choosing and organizing appropriate details to form a plan for writing.

During the drafting stage, the writer, guided but not controlled by an organizational plan, is primarily concerned with development--fleshing out ideas and discovering more fully just what it is he or she really wants to say.

During the revising stage, the writer is primarily concerned with refining--adding, deleting, substituting, rearranging to achieve the best possible words in the best possible order. Only after matters of content and style are reckoned with, does the writer finally turn to editing--cleaning up spelling, punctuation, and other matters of conventional writing etiquette.

Notice that through all four stages of the writing process, what the writer produces is tentative, experimental, developmental. Only at the very end, does the writer concentrate on producing a final product suitable for someone else's eyes.

The traditional approaches to teaching writing largely ignored the prewriting stage, slighted the organizing stage, and often began at the third

stage with the student attempting what was essentially a final product. New approaches, on the other hand, are based on the assumption that if close attention is paid to the process of writing, the product will inevitably follow.

Now, described in this rather oversimplified way, teaching writing as a process seems neither very new nor very revolutionary. However, what is new and revolutionary about it is (as my Friday-afternoon senario suggests) that it has rarely been done in the high school English classroom, at least not until fairly recently. Until now most writing has been assigned; now it is being taught--taught as a process. And here is what is happening to English textbooks as a result.

When one thumbs quickly through new high school texts, the most obvious sign of the new emphasis on writing is that, while texts devoted to composition and grammar are still divided into two major sections, the first section deals with composition and the second section with grammar. This order is just the reverse of that found in older texts, where grammar customarily led off. And now, the composition section, in addition to having the position of greater prominence, is also far more comprehensive, and therefore longer than it was in the past.

This is not to suggest that grammar is being slighted. On the contrary, the trend is toward streamlining the presentation of grammar in such ways as to increase the teacher's options for its use. Older texts usually presented grammar in one of two ways--either as a full course with practice exercises for whole-class instruction or as a handbook--a list of rules--for use as a reference tool by individual students looking for answers to specific problems. Some texts offered grammar handbooks that also contained practice

exercises--a compromise that often made the material unsuitable either as a course of study or as a useful reference. (Have you ever tried to teach a handbook?)

In contrast, the grammar portions of newer texts are being designed to accommodate a variety of uses equally well: as basic course of study or as a refresher course for use with students required to take minimum competency exams; as a resource for small group instruction or individual self-help; and as a writer's reference tool.

The format of these newer texts encourages teachers to view grammar instruction as an adjunct to writing instruction, rather than as isolated information to be taught for its own sake. Having a student put commas and semicolons in twenty practice sentences written by some anonymous textbook editor is certainly not as effective as showing a student how to punctuate his or her own writing, writing in which the student has a personal stake.

Yes, grammar is still very much alive in the new English texts, but, as I've suggested, the changes of real interest are to be found in the sections of the texts that are devoted to composition. It is there that the new trend toward teaching writing as a process becomes evident.

A glance at the table of contents in an older textbook reveals the atomistic approach to composition typical in the past. First there is a chapter on the use of words, then a chapter on writing sentences, followed by a chapter on types of paragraphs (descriptive, narrative, and expository) and finally, if space permitted, a brief chapter titled "The Longer Composition." On first consideration, we seem to have a very logical progression there from small to large, from simple to complex--words to sentences to paragraphs to something longer.

Unfortunately, this is not the way one writes in the real world. The writer doesn't sit down to write words, sentences, or paragraphs that stand

by themselves. The writer writes to solve some problem or to complete some task in writing. In accomplishing this task, the writer is concerned with a whole--a letter, a report, an analysis, an explanation--not with isolated bits and pieces. And the writer's success depends on the effectiveness of the piece as a whole--DOES IT WORK?

The newer English texts help teachers teach the whole composition, not bits and pieces that must be assembled later through some mysterious and unexplained amalgamation. A glance at the table of contents in one of these texts will reveal something similar to the following sequence of topics:

Chapter 1--a short chapter that introduces students to the idea of writing as process and gives then the opportunity to experiment with prewriting, organizing, drafting, and revising without the immediate threat of grades. The chapter might also introduce the students to the use of the journal as an important writer's tool. (I'll have more to say about the journal later.)

Chapter 2--a chapter devoted to expressive writing. Expressive writing is personal writing in which the writer's own experiences, opinions, reactions, feelings, and memories are central concerns. The student is guided in writing such whole pieces as a letter to the editor, a memoir, an autobiographical sketch, a credo, and and an essay of opinion.

Chapter 3--a chapter concerned with informative writing. Informative writing is any writing whose principal purpose is to explain how, what, or why. The student learns to write such whole pieces as a lab report, an extended definition, a how-to article, an essay exam, an occupational profile, a critical essay--even an accident report.

Chapter 4--a chapter concerned with persuasive writing. Persuasive writing is any writing that aims at motivating the reader to take a certain action or to adopt a certain attitude or idea. The student learns to write such whole

pieces as a job application, a letter of complaint to a manufacturer, a public service advertisement, a comparative evaluation, an editorial, and a radio commercial.

Chapter 5--a chapter devoted to imaginative writing. Imaginative writing is any writing in which the writer creates a special form to present the products of his or her imagination through the artful use of language. The student is shown how to write such whole pieces as a one-character short story, a ballad, a why-story for young children, a one-act play, a formula poem, a dramatic scene.

WHY expressive, informative, persuasive, and imaginative writing? And WHY in that order? First of all, writing experts agree that to become fluent and effective writers, students should have experience with all of the four major modes of expression--not just exposition. And they should attempt as many real-world forms--letters, ads, reports, articles, memos, directions--as possible, not just the formal essay. Second, the sequence from internal to external, from self to other, from information gleaned from personal experience to information gathered through research is the easiest and most natural sequence for apprentice writers to follow.

So a glance at a table of contents might provide some evidence of the new trend in English textbooks, but we still need to look closely at the lessons themselves. In the newer texts, each lesson in each chapter takes students step-by-step through the four stages of the writing process. First students are shown a prewriting strategy appropriate for the sort of whole piece they will write. Using this strategy, the students learn how to identify an interesting topic and how to generate a wealth of ideas and details about that topic. Then students are shown how to organize the chaotic results of their prewriting into a tentative plan for writing. Next they learn how to

develop their writing plan into a first draft. Then they are led to revise and rewrite and finally to edit and proofread a final version. In other words, the students are carefully guided through the process of writing from start to finish. Obviously, writing is not simply being assigned; it's being taught.

And a great deal of writing is going on. And while it's important and purposeful writing, it's not the sort of writing that the teacher is going to have to spend hours grading. (Tell a teacher with 150 students that you're instituting a new approach to composition which will greatly increase the amount of writing students do, and you've made an enemy. Tell that same teacher that the new approach will have all her students writing almost daily without burying her under a mountain of paper, and you've won an ally.) As students move successively through the stages of the writing process, they must produce some writing during each of the four stages--finger exercises, if you will, that lead cumulatively toward a final product. But this writing is tentative, experimental, exploratory. It's writing to learn--to discover what to write next. It's prewriting notes, and lists, and brainstorming. It's writing plans and outlines and rough drafts. It's the sort of work-a-day writing that professional writers fill notebook after notebook with before that story, or article, or play, or novel they're working on ever sees the light of day.

Guided by specific instruction in the text, students do this sort of writing in a journal--a writer's notebook or workshop. All finger exercises, including all rough drafts, are done in the journal. Only the final polished draft sees the light of day, and only it need be graded. The teacher may, from time to time, ask to see a student's journal just to keep him on his toes or to check his progress, but grading the exploratory writing it

contains is not only unnecessary but counterproductive. The journal stimulates writing fluency; overzealous grading inhibits it.

Journal-keeping as a central textbook activity, then, is another manifestation of the new emphasis on writing in English textbooks.

Thus far, I've attempted to describe what's been happening to students' texts, but new trends don't stop there. The teacher's materials that accompany these texts are also changing. In the past, more often than not, highschool English teachers were provided with something called a teacher's manual. This was usually a thin, paper-covered and stapled pamphlet that contained nothing more than answers to the exercise items in the student's text. While the thickness of the manual may have increased over the years with the addition of objective tests for grammar, they remained essentially unchanged. And their fate was the same. They were usually lost, purloined, or buried in a bottom desk drawer.

The current trend is for publishers to provide, not a teacher's manual, but a teacher's edition--which is something quite different. A teacher's edition is a student's text with answers and other information printed in color in the margins and with an extensive teacher's guide bound in--usually in the back. This format supports two important teaching activities--preparation and presentation.

In preparing for the lesson, the teacher turns to the guide in the back of the teacher's edition. What she finds there is a descriptive overview of the lesson, including a list of instructional objectives the lesson is designed to achieve; suggestions for presenting the lesson effectively, background information that places the lesson in a larger context; suggestions for

accommodating individual differences; and ideas for extending or enriching the lesson with supplemental activities.

The teacher will also find techniques for instituting and monitoring small group activities (something elementary teachers are quite adept at doing but highschool teachers shy away from), suggestions for using such methods as holistic and primary trait scoring and peer evaluation to lighten the paper load, and a scope and sequence chart that shows what precedes and what follows the lesson in the text and what is treated in the other books in the series. Using the teacher's guide gives the teacher confidence in having a firm grasp of the lesson by helping him know more about the lesson than he will have to teach.

When presenting the lesson, the teacher turns to the annotated text in the front of the teacher's edition--the same text the students have before them. The answers to discussion questions and to practice exercises are right there on the page, not in a manual that was left at home. Freed from the anxiety of always having to have the right answer ready, the teacher can concentrate on bringing the lesson to life, on orchestrating a lively learning experience.

Such comprehensive teaching aids are especially important during times of curricular change--and especially now when particular emphasis is being placed on new approaches to teaching writing. I know from personal experience that nothing in the English curriculum intimidates teachers more than the teaching of writing. Nothing is so difficult for them. Why it should be so is not difficult to understand. No one has ever really taught them <u>how</u> to teach writing. I have a master's degree in English education and have never taken a single course in writing instruction. The teacher-training institutions I attended concentrated almost exclusively on

the teaching of literature. It was always assumed that, being an English major, I surely must know how to write, and, knowing how to write myself, I could easily teach others. Unfortunately, it just ain't so.

The recent resurgence in inservice training, exemplified by the Bay Area Writing Project and its offshoots throughout the country, has accomplished a good deal in helping teachers improve the teaching of writing. But a good many teachers remain who have yet to hear the news. The trend toward more comprehensive teachers' editions for English texts will be a boon to those who have not.

Changes in the curriculum that lead to changes in textbooks also lead, inevitably, to changes in how the business of the typical English classroom is conducted. When I was teaching, it was a common belief among English teachers that the principal evaluated teachers' performance during his daily stroll through the halls. If, when he passed a room, there was complete silence or if only the drone of the teacher's voice could be heard--there was a good teacher involved in good teaching. If, on the other hand, there was the sound of movement and the animated voices of students predominated--there was a teacher who had lost control and not much learning was going on in room 222. Whether or not the principal actually made such judgments is doubtful. The point is that the teachers believed he did.

A classroom in which writing is being taught as a process will often be a noisy one. There may be groups of four or five students involved in lively brainstorming sessions. Three or four students may be at the board making lists, erasing, adding, caught up in the excitement of generating and sharing ideas. Two students may have gotten together for a down-and-dirty session of peer editing, reading their writing aloud to each other, asking questions,

suggesting changes. The classroom may look and sound like the city room of a newspaper with students moving from station to station--editing, copying, collating, and stapling together pieces of student writing to create a booklet for distribution to other classrooms or for display in the library or to send home to parents.

Instead of standing behind a podium in the front of the room, the teacher may be walking from group to group, sitting down from time to time to join in. Or she may be involved in one-on-one conferences with young writers who, for the moment, need some special help while the rest of the class is busy with other tasks. She may even be reading her own composition aloud for the students to evaluate!

Such classrooms and such teachers need support and encouragement. Administrators should let teachers know that they know that a bustling classroom can be a very fertile atmosphere for learning. If you are an administrator, when you take your daily stroll down the halls, don't just walk by. Stop in and join a group. Who knows? You may pick up a few good pointers for improving your own writing.

To summarize: The most important new trend in language arts textbooks is the result of a change in the way writing is being taught. New textbooks mirror this change by providing materials designed to support the teaching of writing as a process. In my opinion, this new approach to writing is the most exciting and potentially the most fruitful curriculum development in many a year.